

Does God hate?

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Introduction

After services this past Sunday (February 7), someone asked me a question about a statement that I made and a reference I used during the sermon concerning the idea that God hates. Here is how I said it during the message:

“I know we like to think that God loves everyone in the world, but the Bible makes it clear that that is not the case.”

I then quoted from Psalm 11.5.

After reflection, I believe the statement may have been more effectively and accurately stated like this:

“I know we like to think that God has only love for every person in the world, but the Bible makes it very clear that God does hate some people.”

The fact is that the statement, no matter how it was worded, would still have caused several people some confusion. So, the question following the service had great merit. I will try to answer the question here since the answer seems to affect several people.

I give notice that this is not an exhaustive study of the subject (although it was somewhat exhausting to write and will probably exhaust you to read) and is certainly open to rebuttal or further discussion and questions. I welcome this.

The question

The point was made that the word hate as used in the Old Testament does not mean the same thing in Hebrew that it means in English, but should more accurately be translated as “loves less.”

The scripture used as support for this idea is Gen. 29:30-31 *And he (Jacob) went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him (Laban) yet seven other years. And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.*

Verse 30 uses a comparative statement: Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. It is pointed out, then, that the word hate in verse 31 is actually a comparative word which does not mean that Jacob literally hated Leah; it more accurately means that Jacob loved Leah less than he did Rachel.

In the context of these two verses, this is an accurate translation. This same application can be made in several other references in the Old Testament.

The issue here is that this translation, or more accurately, this interpretation, cannot be extrapolated, or made to apply, to every use of the same word in the Old Testament.

Old Testament words for hate

There are seven words used in the Old Testament that are translated as hate. Some are used only once. The ones most frequently used are *satam* and *sane'* and its derivatives.

The word *satam* is used six times in the Old Testament. It is translated "hate" five times and "oppose" one time. It means "to hate, oppose oneself to, bear a grudge, retain animosity against, to cherish animosity against, to harass."

(So, any person who bears animosity or a grudge against another person is harboring feelings of hatred against that person in their heart – a scary thought when we remember how Jesus equated the emotions of our hearts to violations of the Ten Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount.)

The second word, *sane'*, or one of its derivatives, is used 164 times in the Old Testament. This is the word used in Gen. 26:31. The word *sane'* is translated as hate or hateful 137 times. Other translations include enemy or enemies, foes, and odious. It is defined as "to hate, to dislike, to be in enmity." One of the first things to note is that these words, *enemy* and *odious*, are not terms of slight degree, but are extreme words.

Examples of the use of hate

If the best translation of the word *sane'* is "loves less than," then we should be able to insert this thought into other references using the word *sane'* without changing the sense of the verse. Since there are 164 uses of the word in the Old Testament, we cannot try them all, but if you would like to try it yourself, click [here](#) for a pdf document of all references using the word.

- Lev. 26:17 And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you (love you less) shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you.
- Deut. 16:22 Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the LORD thy God hateth (loves less).
- Deut. 19:11 But if any man hate his neighbor (loves his neighbor less), and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities:
- 2 Sam. 22:41 Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me (love me less).
- Esther 9:5 Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them (loved them less).

These first five examples are, I believe, self-explanatory. The intention of each verse seems to change when the idea of "loves less" is inserted. Additionally, when a comparative term is used, there should be something to which it can be compared. There does not seem to be any other object or term to which the word hate can be compared in these verses.

- Eccl. 3:8 A time to love, and a time to hate (love less); a time of war, and a time of peace.

This verse from Ecclesiastes is one in a series of verses making a contrast between opposites: killing and healing, weeping and laughing, getting and losing, rending and silence. These are contrasts between distinct opposites, not varying degrees of similar concepts.

Replacing hate in Eccl. 3:8 with the comparative term “loves less” changes the contrast of opposites to a simple comparison of similar things. That violates the whole sense of the context of the verse. It appears that replacing hate with “love less” will not work here either.

- Proverbs 6:16-19 These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Proverbs 6:16-19 is a list of seven things that God hates. The first five things are pride, lying, murder, deceit, and evil. It is unlikely that anyone would argue that God loves these less than He does other things such as humility, truthfulness, love, honesty, and goodness. Most people would agree that God truly hates these behaviors as well as all evil things.

The argument could be made that these are all impersonal things that God hates and not people. Yet in each reference, the verses do not say that God hates the sin (although He does). The verses say that He hates a human body part that is connected to the sin. That personalizes the hate.

Then, in verse 19, the list of things God hates gets even more personal. This verse does not say that God hates lying, but that He hates the false witness – a person. It does not say that God hates discord among the brethren, but that God hates the person who is sowing the discord.

Furthermore, look back at Prov. 6:16. We find that God does not only hate the seven items in this list; in fact, they “are an abomination unto him.” Here is a verse that allows the Bible to interpret the Bible along the lines of the verse quoted at the beginning from Gen. 29:30-31.

God does not just hate these things (these people); they are an abomination to Him. This word is a derivative of the word “abhor,” which we will look at in just a moment. An abomination does not refer to a degree of love, but to something that is detested or hated absolutely. The writer wanted to make sure that there was no misunderstanding about how God felt about this list. These are things – or people, if you will – that God detests.

That does not mean that these are people who cannot be saved or sins that cannot be forgiven. The only unforgivable sin is the continued sin of unbelief. Yet the verse is clear that the emotion God is expressing here is not a love that is comparatively less than the love He has for righteousness, but a clearly defined hatred.

(If I may add something here about these verses: This list is not meant to be hierarchical. In other words, the list of evils does not get more or less severe from top to bottom. But the seventh sin – that of sowing discord among the brethren – is as bad as all of the other six put together. It is the thing – the person – that God hates most in this list.)

- Psalm 5:5 The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate (love less) all workers of iniquity. 6 You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

These verses provide another example of words that allow us to interpret one with the other. Verse 5 says that God hates all workers of iniquity. Note that this does not say that God hates iniquity (which He does), but that He hates the workers of iniquity. That personalizes the hate.

Verse 6 continues the thought of how God feels about sin by saying that God abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

- Hosea 9:15 All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them (loved them less): for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolvers.

Once again we have a comparison or a commentary on the word hate similar to that used in Gen. 29:30-31, Psalm 6:19, and Psalm 5:5-6.

In the first part of the verse, God says that he hated those who sinned at Gilgal. Then, in the second part of the verse, He says that He will “love them no more.” This is a fairly clear statement that there is a time when God ceases to love and begins to hate. The idea of “loves less” fits here only in the sense that the measure of “less” is zero.

There are 13 words for abhor used in the Old Testament along with derivatives such as that used in Proverbs 6:16. The word abhor that is used here in Hosea is *ta’ab*. It means “to detest or loath.” That is a word of tremendous degree. It does not equate to a lessening of love but to the extreme of hatred.

Examples of the use of abhor

A word used in Scripture that is synonymous with hate is the word abhor. It is used in similar verses referencing God’s attitude toward those who practice sin. Here are examples of other verses where the word abhor is used to describe the reaction God has to those who practice sin:

- Lev. 20:23 And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them.
- Lev. 26:30 And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you.
- Psalm 10:3 For the wicked boasteth of his heart’s desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth.

Conclusion

So whether we are comfortable with the concept or not, God does hate some people. He does love them less than others, but not by a comparative degree. He hates them in stark contrast to those who are truthful witnesses and who work for unity among the brethren.

Replacing the word hate with the phrase “loves less” in these verses would be totally inappropriate.

The point is that we cannot make such a universal leap as expanding the meaning of a word in one context to all contexts. The fact is that God does hate some people. It may be a difficult concept, but it is truth.

